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SUBJECT: TANZANIA MEDIA REACTION: Increase Pressure on Madagascar Regime

The March 23 edition of English language daily "The Citizen" (circulation 7,500) carried the following editorial commentary on page 8 entitled "Increase pressure on Madagascar Regime:

"The African Union's decision to suspend Madagascar following an unconstitutional change of government in the Indian Ocean Island is commendable. What happened in Madagascar last week after opposition leader Andry Rajoelina took power with the support of the army amounted to a coup, as rightly observed by the chairman of the AU's Peace and Security Council, Mr. Bruno Nongoma Zidouemba.

The AU's decision should send a strong message that flagrant violation of the constitutions of member states by power-hungry individuals out to satisfy their egos has no place in present-day Africa. Madagascar has swiftly transformed from a democracy into a civilian-cum-military dictatorship, dealing a blow to efforts to entrench democracy on the continent.

Mr. Rajoelina cannot claim to be a democrat after inciting Madagascans to violence in response to his sacking as the mayor of Antananarivo by former President Marc Ravalomanana earlier this year. Mr. Rajoelina finally took power last week, but not before at least 135 people died in illegal street protests called by the opposition leader in his quest to settle scores with Mr. Ravalomanana.

It should be remembered that Mr. Ravalomanana was elected in December 2006 in elections that international observers generally considered free and fair. If the 34-year-old Rajoelina was a true democrat, he should have waited until the 2016 elections when he would have been eligible to contest the presidency.

Madagascar's constitution, which has effectively been suspended following last week's coup, bars candidates below 40 years of age from vying for the presidency, which means that Mr. Rajoelina would still be ineligible even if he wished to stand in the 2011 elections. The regime in Antananarivo already faces international isolation following Madagascar's suspension by the AU, the Southern African Development Community's decision not to recognize the new leaders and the United States' declaration that it planned to halt all but emergency aid.

More pressure is needed to ensure a return to democratic and constitutional rule on the island in the shortest time possible."

ANDRE